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June 1991

The "New" USAF School of Aerospace Medicine
(Brooks AFB 75th Anniversary Celebration)

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A major event planned in San Antonio, Texas, in November 1992 will mark the 75th anniversary of the establishment of Brooks Air Force Base, home of the USAF School of Aerospace Medicine and Armstrong Laboratory. The school in association with the laboratories has evolved, with Brooks AFB, through a series of major events to be highlighted in the several programs scheduled for the public during the anniversary celebrations. This event is certain to complement the significance of the monumental contributions of our famous aerospace medicine center and give cause to those close to the institution to recall with nostalgia the very colorful and complex history of aviation medicine.

Through this evolutionary process, the school and laboratories not only have assumed varying postures to changing technology, but also have influenced the course of aeronautical and aeromedical technology that continues to drive the explosive advances seen in the aviation and space environment today. The institution's flexibility and vision in responding to changes have been fostered for the most part by tremendous foresight of its founders and fresh thinking promoted through its continuing focus on academics. In the past 75 years and through more than 5 major organizational changes, our academic and research programs have sustained the capability of covering all aspects essential to the support of aerospace systems and its functional environment. The driving needs for those systems and environments have sustained the aerospace medical center many of us have enjoyed for more than 30 years. All of us who are and

have been, in some way, part of this impressive heritage can look with extreme pride to the products of our institution.

As we reflect back from this perspective, we recall the development of a research laboratory that eventually evolved to a separate academic institution. Later, a series of similar changes involving academics and research met new demands and, through an integrated academic and research concept, explored and expanded boundaries that seem antique in today's world. While that paradigm of integration holds true today, the geometric proliferation of technology within our specialty has so exceeded our conceptual boundaries that definition must now become the first order of every scientific and academic excursion. Not unlike decisions of the past that led to major changes in the organized structure and philosophy of the USAF aerospace medicine program, we are now faced with the need for a major readjustment to the demands of the future.

Within the strategies of our latest readjustment, we have recognized that the blurred differences between technology and academics have now become clumsy in our present and future technological abundance. Our organizational roles and the needs of the future must be defined explicitly and the already available resources to satisfy those needs must be explored in depth and applied before looking to new discoveries. Clearly,

distinct and more specialized roles for us are inevitable as the age of specialization displaces past and cherished traditions--an unquestionable paradox of broadening demands, limited resources, and increasing expectations for precision.

This most recent, and perhaps the most significant, change in the chronology of the USAF aerospace medicine program has been precipitated by this evolving and somewhat bewildering milieu of science and technology. From that background, a major reorganization and management scheme was planned and implemented.

Refinement and consolidation are the key terms that have been coined whose origins are apparent when considering resource constraints in the face of perceived expanding and overlapping areas of activity. These terms also apply in effecting the level of definition sorely needed in our aerospace medical science and technology and education.

While initiation of the structural changes within Human Systems Division (HSD) occurred in December 1990, implementation continues into the final and refinement phases. The strength and wisdom of the change that has been inherently correct in the past, prevails today and projects into the future a preeminent aerospace medical institution whose time for change has come and whose change has again effectively occurred for time.

All laboratory functions of HSD, combined as a huge but well-

defined Armstrong Laboratory, joins with HSD's Human Systems Program Office forming the facilitating synergy necessary for the transition of technology to our operational systems. As the lead agency in aerospace life sciences, Armstrong Laboratory, with the Systems Program Office, will provide a science-to-system continuum to map out a future ensuring the human as the central focus in aerospace systems. It is within this full range of system's development that the knowledge base lies for the newly defined USAF School of Aerospace Medicine. Indeed, with complete integration of the school, both academically and explicitly, within these elements the USAF School of Aerospace Medicine emerges solidly as the academic arm of the Human Systems Division and the premiere institution for aerospace medicine education for the USAF Medical Service.

The school's enhanced academic status through expanded and much refined curriculum content, its university and medical center affiliation, associated faculty appointments and mutual participation leads clearly to the university concept envisioned more than 40 years ago by Gen Harry G. Armstrong. As in changes of the past, Armstrong's concept of a synergism of research and academics has remained intact throughout the many past organizational changes. The key to the success of our institution has always been its insight to needs, flexibility to respond, and its members' willingness to accept and, moreover, to support

the inevitable but disquieting idea of change. As we adapt to our renewed environment and prepare for the future, leaders are already emerging with ideas and concepts that will become the substance of success and the seeds of change for the next generation of aerospace medicine.